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CURRENT OPINION

Religion and the World-Issue

The great question before the thoughtful writers of our periodical literature during these latter months is the nature of the new world which is to come out of the agonies of war and the part Christianity and the church are to play in the building of that new world. In the *New Republic* for August 18, Mr. J. E. McAfee deals with the topic.

"No epoch in human history," he says, "has been more charged with religious significance." This would seem to be the supreme time for organized religion to take up a magnificent task—but instead, it stands bewildered, hesitating, uncertain. Pulpit messages are confused and vague. There seems to be no program. Why? To one who understands the genius of Christian organizations the answer is plain. There is need for a radical religious reorganization and profound change of fundamental ideas before the religious world will be able to face the issue. The real call of the present day is to souls on fire with a passion for democracy, but orthodoxy has no fundamental interest in democracy. Its faith in democracy reaches no deeper than the social surfaces; "faith in elemental democracy is reserved and incidental." "Democracy in so far as it is admirable to orthodoxy is a desirable makeshift, a convenient but ephemeral device to close the gap between now and when the benevolent and unerring divine autocracy shall be ushered in. The idea of struggling deity, now triumphant, now succumbing, to triumph again among the uncertainties of the moral order, is incomprehensible heresy. None of our approved creeds accepts the universe as the great moral adventure which democracy essentially is. An ultimate moral fixity is the all but universal hope."

This lack of interest and faith in the great moral adventure of democracy is shown in the feverish revival of premillenarianism. It stands for the belief that the present world-order is inherently evil and is to be destroyed at the second coming of the triumphant Christ. The world-war is to be interpreted as Armageddon. It will be succeeded by a cataclysm which will destroy the enemies of Christ. "In probably 90 per cent of the summer schools this year the doctrine was openly or surreptitiously exploited. It is being taught from hundreds of pulpits." How is it possible for men holding this conception to have any real enthusiasm or any vital program for an evolving, adventurous democracy?

There are other religious groups also which cannot be depended upon in the present crisis. A large element in America has vigorously urged the overthrow of autocracy abroad, but demonstrate their lack of faith in democracy itself by the fact that the net effect of their activity at home has been to enthrone autocracy in our own economic and industrial order. In missionary circles and elsewhere there is emphasis on the saving of souls, on "preaching the gospel," on individualistic salvation, rather than on the great moral and social reforms by which alone can come the salvation of the world for which democracy hopes. When this great program is neglected or not even considered, what help or guidance can democracy find in those who still fatuously reiterate, "These moral and social reforms are all well enough, but our real mission is to preach the gospel"?

A view of the efforts of the divided religious forces to secure union gives no more hope. The enthusiastic advocates in too many cases do not represent the denominations for whom they claim to speak. On the other hand, there is always the

danger of reactionary elements within these so-called federations. "A host, with their ranks thin at the best and imperiled from attacks from nominal supporters in the rear, does not promise a brilliant campaign however genuinely it may be inspired by the purposes of the present national and world-issue." "Democracy demands today the larger integrations of human brotherhood. The religious life of America, riddled by sectarian faction, twisted into an inconceivable tangle of mutually exclusive parties and programs, furnishes a depressing prospect of an American religious consciousness mobilized for the permanent achievement of these integrations." In the case of the Roman church and kindred church organizations the hope of mobilization for democratic internationalism is discouragingly faint.

Yet the light of hope is on the horizon. The new advance of democracy is inspired by profound religious convictions. The religious significance of the new internationalism is in danger of being obscured by the fact that the so-called religious organizations are indifferent or inhibitive of it, and by the fact that the inspiring forces of the new day are not called religious. Owing to the present bewilderment or antagonism of religion, so-called, to the new movements, the zeal for democracy declares its divorce from religion. "The achievement of the task will dispel the confusion, and the immense volume of moral and spiritual energy which has been long moving in our society out of accord and relation with the constituted agencies of religion will be recognized for what it really is. The religion of democracy, the passion for the universal human brotherhood, will ere long establish a new alignment of forces. It will release spiritual agencies which now content themselves with negations and are artificially inhibited from a thoroughgoing regenerative ministry. The future is bright with promise.

The New Religion

In the *Hibbert Journal* for July the Countess of Warwick writes on the future of religion in England in a vein of mingled sarcasm, sorrow, and hope—sarcasm for the established church which she sees as faithless to its great trust; sorrow for the broken war-victims left without guide or comforter; hope for a new religion which shall replace the old. The established church, she thinks, has completely failed to face its responsibility; it has no message for the sufferers; makes no attempt to "reconcile its conception of the Almighty and loving Father with the Power that has permitted millions to go to death for quarrels of which they know little and care less." She says:

> Unfortunately there is much to suggest that the established church is conserving its courage for the post-bellum task of preaching the old platitudes and asking those who have seen war and suffered by it to take them seriously. For the sake of our forbears, for the sake of our earlier faith and friendships, we will turn our heads away and try to forget that the best-cared-for and most highly pampered appanage of the state failed in the hour of need to "play the game."

This failure in the hour of critical necessity is merely the climax of long years of failure to face the problems of life in times of peace. The church has dwelt in a world of its own imaginings, has never dared to tell the truth to the comfortable and possessing classes. Without anxiety it has allowed unspeakable slums to exist. Drink, disease, poverty, and vice have been for years before the eyes of the established church with no attempt being made to alter them. The scathing rebuke continues:

> I do not expect to live to see the established church recognize the truth that the real salvation of this country depends upon the removal of all existing social conditions that create paupers, criminals, and lunatics. I do not expect to hear ministers advocating ceaselessly

in the pulpit the necessary measures for restoring the social balance.

At last men are realizing that too much has been thought of the souls of men and too little of their bodies. Now many are beginning to think that if a soul be set in a body properly clad and housed, fed and cared for, the soul will find out its own salvation, and if that fails it will at least be no worse off than it must needs be today in the keeping of a dead church. The nonconformist churches alone have had a wide-eyed and courageous ministry. "The chapel has not hesitated to tell the truth."

The new religion is to be found in devotion to social service. Care for humanity must have the highest place in the human heart. The established church has failed because it has left too much to Christ. "It has committed to him all the fruits of its own failures and continued to fail with a tranquil mind. Not by saying that what is must be will the new religion succeed, but by declaring that much that is must promptly cease to be." The vast weight of common sorrow will weld the millions together in the great, new devotion to humanity. These sufferers will not turn to the church which has failed them.

For the great mass there will be no hope within its walls, but there will be a great hope outside them. To heal the wounds of others, to comfort the widow and fatherless, to struggle for the right of men and women to the proper measure of life, to oppose stern resistance to every measure by which man sacrifices man to his ambition and woman to his lusts, to equalize the burdens and the pleasures of sane and normal life—these will be the burdens of the new religion.

The new religion will have no priests, no ritual, no establishment, no superiors and inferiors, no theology, no bond of unity save that of service in the common human cause. Not the next world but this world will be the burden of the message of the evangelist of the new day—this world which mankind has in the past endeavored to make a heaven for the few and a hell for the multitude, failing in the first endeavor perhaps, but meeting with an extraordinary measure of success in the last. There never was a time in the history of civilization when the call was louder for a new religion that seeks to mend the old earth and leaves the things lying beyond to a supreme and all-divining power.

The message of the new religion is not glad tidings, but evil news indeed. Its task is to tell the people, "ignored by government, fooled by politicians, exploited by commercial magnates, degraded by landlords, drugged by philanthropists, and thrown with all classes of the community into the furnace seven times heated of war" that their plight is desperately evil and wretched—and yet not altogether hopeless.

The exponents of the new religion have no organization, no common method, no knowledge of one another. They will be made up of the remnant of idealists and thinkers of the soldiers, who have faced death, of all classes "who have realized something of the proportion in which honor and misery, glory and squalor, brutality and waste, mingle to make up war."

From the heart-breaking sadness of contemplating the past, from the wretchedness of the present, Countess Warwick turns with hope to the future, believing that it is still possible for the future to atone for the past and the present. In vision she sees "the progress of a creedless religion that has no ministers and no houses of worship, that gathers men and women of all classes to its service and yet keeps them apart, that supplies but one doctrine and leaves the method of carrying it out to the individual." The world is to be freed from the evils which destroy and man given the opportunity to find in peace and labor his fullest and most complete life.

There is no more reliance for us upon miracles or upon mere sentiment as cures for the

conditions which made war easy if they did not make it inevitable. For each and all a definitely appointed labor, to give social service the status of a religion, to preach not Christ but Man crucified, and to bear Man down from that cross to which he has been nailed so long that all the evil in the world can be wrought without reference to his sovereign will.

Christianity and the Spirit of Democracy

The world is to be made "safe for democracy." A safe democracy will demand a religion in accord with its controlling principles. In the *American Journal of Theology* for July, Professor Gerald B. Smith undertakes an inquiry as to whether Christianity is able to furnish the religious and moral attitude indispensable to democracy.

The fundamentals of the gospel of Jesus —the Golden Rule, the attitude of good will, the conception of the value of every human soul—are inalienable from a society which is to live on the basis of righteousness and mutual trust. But Christianity is more than the gospel of Jesus. It has doctrines and practices which are considered indispensable. The Christian church has developed in relation to the politics of imperialism. It has never consciously faced its task in terms of a democratic civilization. Will Christianity be able to make such an adjustment as will incorporate within itself the liberal democratic ideals?

The first problem to be faced is the conception of authority. Democracy insists that men shall have the right to determine for themselves what is their duty as against an arbitrary dictation from above. The history of modern Christianity is really the story of the struggle between the autocratic theology of the mediaeval church and the desire of Christian people to gain control of their own religious life. In mediaeval Catholicism the content of a man's belief was determined for him by a superior power. He could not criticize; he could only accept and obey.

Modern Catholicism is seeking to maintain in the world a religiously controlled civilization, the control being in the hands of officials whose responsibility is not to living people, but to a superhuman commission affirmed to be of divine authority. The religion of Catholicism is a consistent expression of absolutism. It can never interpret democracy, for it distrusts democracy.

Protestantism has made democracy possible. Ecclesiastical control is limited to those who voluntarily submit to that control. But Protestantism has not realized the full meaning of democracy in religion. It is still touched with mediaevalism in its feeling that independent inquiry is dangerous and that dissent from authoritative teaching and scriptural doctrines is disloyalty to God. Freedom of criticism is essential in a political democracy; it is no less essential to a religion serving a democratic age. Christianity will have to give free rein to biblical criticism and be ready to appreciate the historical method of interpretation if it is really to keep the Bible as a guide for the new day. In the realization that the authors of the biblical literature secured their authority by their understanding of the life of their day, Christianity may be able to look for the guidance of God, not in traditional norms, but in the throbbing activity of modern life.

Democracy is not too reverent toward the past. It builds for the better future. "Catholicism and Protestantism alike have defined Christianity as something that was divinely prescribed in obligatory form at the beginning. If this definition be accepted the supreme duty is to reproduce this authoritative model." It is true that the Y.M.C.A. and other forces have shown that some organizations within Christianity do find guidance in the demands of present and future conditions rather than by consulting the Scriptures. Yet Christianity is held by the dead hand of the past more than is generally realized. Conformity is the pathway to favor in the church. The

mediaeval habit of mind still persists in the church even when honest attempts are made to face present problems. To guide a democratic world the Christian forces must produce and support leaders who are forward-looking and unshackled by the past.

Still further, in a democratic world Christianity will need to adopt the method of scientific experiment to determine the truth for life. Democracy is a vast experiment. It can exist only as there is freedom to conduct the great experiment of government in such a way as to make the best use of increasing human wisdom. The right to experiment, even though mistakes are made, is to be preferred to the compulsion of a supposedly infallible alien authority. Does the Christian church welcome experiments in belief and practice? "To assume that the doctrines which gave inspiration to mediaeval life will without change be suited to a world in which scientific experiment and democratic mobility are dominant is to beg the entire question. We simply cannot find out what the task and function of Christianity in the new age is to be without experiment." The church must be willing to recognize the desirability of scientific questioning in the realm of religion, to put its doctrines, its organization, its ritual, to the test of actual experiment and to make changes if necessary.

Finally, all this will require a new type of religious faith. The old type of assurance of Protestantism is impossible in the great experiment of democratic life. The new faith will look to the future for its justification. To insist prematurely on dogmatic finalities would be to defeat the best outcome of human progress. Assurance will be no longer the most important thing in religion. The faith of democracy must be a forward-looking faith. The future is to be better than the present. "Instead of trying to reinstate primitive Christianity, we must learn to think of Christianity as a religious movement always developing, always learning from the progress of history how better to interpret the providential guidance of God." Not to preserve the religion of our fathers, but to secure a better religious life for the coming generation, is the great demand.

The Pulpit and Its Opportunities

Writing as a layman who unwillingly finds himself detached from the church of his childhood, Mr. F. H. Cutcliffe offers a friendly statement of opinion to the churches and the preachers in the July number of the *Hibbert Journal*. He starts from the premise that the preacher's mission is to proclaim a gospel of salvation from sin—to help men to live up to the highest moral and spiritual ideals of which they are conscious. But the message of the evangelist, as of the sacerdotalist, he thinks, is lost in a confusion of tongues. The old power of the pulpit to terrorize is gone. It has lost also the power to attract. "So long have we been familiarized with the idea of one sacred book, of one holy day in seven, one chosen people, one type of heaven, one special sequence of revelation that the grandeur of the book, the real privilege of the day, the significance of the Hebrew character in history, the charm of the heaven, the sublimity of unfolding revelation have eluded our mental grasp." Meanwhile vast sources of inspiration of noble living are left unexplored. The average pulpit completely neglects comparative religion and comparative morality. Literature, science, art, the insight of modern prophets, the vision of poets, would give great reinforcement to the pulpit if they were only used. Modern science carries a far more significant revelation for our generation than the Book of Genesis.

Compared with the archaic cult of Hebraism of the modern pulpit, how different was the teaching of Jesus! The people were glad to hear him, not because he was always harking back to Abraham

and Moses, but "because he sweetened the springs of daily life and touched the hearts and stimulated the spiritual vision of his hearers by some simple picture of blowing lilies, of husbandmen tilling the fields, of maidens at a marriage feast, of the beggar lying at the gate—thus conveying some swift suggestion of the sacredness of common life."

The preacher of today should know the hearts of little children; should study the streets, the homes of the people, the workshops and clubs, which are full even though the pews are empty. Such a study might even suggest that the best way to fill the pews would be to empty the gutters of the little wastrels who have no happier home. It might also show that the life-energy which, because of ignorance and poverty of imagination, now finds outlet in squalor and vice might, by the leading of a wise pulpit, be the force which would create heroes and saints instead of criminals. The preacher would be made more efficient by even an elementary study of the laws of physiology and psychology—"laws which are surely as God-given as any to be found in the Mosaic code." If the pulpit is to bring about a moral revival it must plumb the great currents of human life, test their force and direction, and thus learn to guide them into channels where they shall purify all our individual and corporate life.

It is not the immoral and degraded alone who are outside the pale of the churches. Many have left the church, not to "spend their substance in riotous living," but because they cannot live on the "husks" handed out by the modern pulpit. "And if plain truth were told, many of those who are still in the pews are just as hungry, just as dissatisfied, as their wandering brothers."

They feel that the pulpit should deal frankly and courageously with the doctrine of evolution in its relation to Christian revelation; that it should show us in some sequential form the development of Christianity; that it should testify, with a broad appreciation, to the contributions of other faiths in the great unfolding of the divine purpose for man; that it should cease to wrench our lives into the fatal dualism of sacred and secular; that it should learn to recognize inspired voices among ourselves and in our own time as well as those which spoke in Judea; that it should, indeed, itself be inspired to speak with an authority not derived from the scribes.

With few exceptions the work of the pulpit is incoherent, scrappy, and without unifying purpose. Worse still, sometimes it is ponderous. The preachers have not learned to use the plain Anglo-Saxon speech. If it would face and master its sublime task, the pulpit will have to organize its forces and specialize in the various fields. One thing is sure. "The pulpit can hold aloof from no interest of our daily life without losing its influence whenever and wherever that interest is concerned. If it is to be our guide, philosopher, and friend, it must know what it is talking about."